

Sound/
Furniture

響け！

武田綾乃

Original Characters

ユーフォニアム

北宇治高校吹奏楽部のヒミツの結



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宝島社

Hibike! Euphonium - Volume 01

Chapter 00-01

Table of Contents

1. [Prologue](#)
2. [Chapter 1 - Hello Euphonium](#)

Prologue

Prologue[[edit](#)]

A few hundred faces all had their gazes fixated in the same direction. In the plaza, the air carrying the swirling heat colored the cheeks of the young maidens red. Kumiko breathed out slowly, trying to calm herself. *Lub-dub, lub-dub*, the throbbing sounds of her heart pounded in her ears. Sweat clung to the palms of her tightly clenched hands, and crescent marks were made in those palms as the tip of her nails bit into them.

"I might just die from this tension."

Azusa, who seemed unable to stand it any longer, muttered in a low voice. *Me too*, Kumiko replied as she opened her eyes wide.

Kyoto prefecture concert band competition.

Those simple words were laid out on the erected signboard. This was the third time she had been to this hall since she entered junior high. She had been coming here with the thought of aiming for the Kansai regionals each year. Kumiko's fists unconsciously became tighter and tighter.

"It's here."

A sound escaped from someone. Men carrying a large piece of paper appeared as they moved forward slowly. Everyone's gaze was fixed on them. Her heart was jumping around like a flea in her chest. It seemed like she would faint from the heat swimming in her head. Pressing both her hands against her flushed cheeks, Kumiko too looked hard at that piece of paper.

The piece of paper was slowly unrolled by the men. Names of the junior high schools were laid out on it. The words, 'Gold', 'Silver', 'Bronze' were written beside those names. And beside her junior high was..... before she could finish her thought, Azusa's cheer rang out.

"It's gold!"

Seemingly infected by her cry perhaps, high-pitched screams rang out from everywhere. *We did it! It's gold!* There were schools that went abuzz, and schools that remained hushed. The severe reality called 'results' struck before her eyes. Kumiko turned her eyes to the neighboring students from another school which seemed to be carrying a funeral-like atmosphere, and hesitated for a moment in her rejoicer.

"Kumiko! Why're you spacing out! It's gold, I'm telling you, it's gold!"

As a result of Azusa's sudden embrace, Kumiko too, finally let out a smile.

"..... yeah, that's great."

"I'm gonna go let Asami know. That girl's so nervous that she shut herself in the toilet."

"Got it, don't be late for our departure."

"Roger!"

After an energetic reply, Azusa started running off into the hall. Her black ponytail swayed along, matching her movements. Kumiko opened her tightly clenched hands and once again turned her eyes back to the piece of paper on which the results were written. There was no doubt that the gold award was imprinted beside the name of her junior high.

Even though it was a gold, it was really a dud gold whereby they were unable to proceed to the Kansai regionals, but still, a gold award was passable. Kumiko took a glance at their adviser, who had clapped his hands together with a satisfied looking face. *Thank goodness, it's gold!* The reality gradually sunk into Kumiko as well. *Whew*, as she breathed out a sigh of relief, her strength left her knees. *That was nerve-wrecking*, she thought once again.

It's great isn't it? Just as Kumiko was about to say those words to those who played the same instrument as her, she thought she saw something out of place within her field of vision. As her eyes roamed to search for its cause, they unexpectedly met Reina's eyes. Without a shred of a smile, she merely stood rooted to the spot, her hand grasping her trumpet tightly.

"Are you overjoyed to tears?"

Kumiko asked timidly, to which Reina shook her head wordlessly in response. Within those large determined eyes of hers, a thin film of tears formed.

".....ing."

"Huh?"

When Kumiko queried again, Reina repeated her words audibly.

"It's frustrating. This frustration's killing me. Why is everyone pleased with just a gold? Aren't we aiming for the nationals?"

Droplets of tears overflowed from those eyes. As if she were trying to escape, Kumiko promptly averted her eyes. Her face felt hot as if it were on fire. She was ashamed of herself for feeling relieved at getting a gold.

"..... did you really think that we can go to the nationals?"

Reina wiped her eyes with her hand roughly and sniffed. Her pale pink lips quivered in agitation, as if to rebuke Kumiko.

"Don't you feel vexed at all?"

Her bitter words pierced right through Kumiko's heart.

"I'm vexed. Extremely vexed."

Those choked out words were unpleasantly engraved into Kumiko's mind.

Whenever Kumiko thought of her last competition in junior high, she would remember those eyes of hers. And each time she recalled them, she would get an intense urge to flee from that summer.

Translator's Notes and References[[edit](#)]

Chapter 1 - Hello Euphonium

Chapter 1 - Hello Euphonium[[edit](#)]

Navy blue skirts gathered above the knees. The fair legs that extended from those skirts were lined up in rows in the gymnasium. Slender legs. Stout legs. Young men dressed in stand-up collared shirts were sending restless enthusiastic glances to them. The young maidens, who appeared oblivious to that, were freely exposing their young and lustrous skin. While taking in all this absentmindedly, Kumiko looked down at her own appearance. A girl with a lean body clad in a navy blue sailor uniform. Why did she believe in the rumor about how a girl's chest would get larger upon entering high school? After a glance at the girl standing beside her, whose voluptuous curves she could tell even from beneath the fabric, Kumiko sighed quietly.

Kyoto Prefectural Kitauji^[1] High was famous for its cute uniforms. Its sailor uniform, the only one in Uji City, had received good reviews from other schools as well. Its academic ability was above average, and it was not like it had a particularly good college admission rate. The reason why Kumiko had chosen such a high school was because of its cute uniform. If she was selecting a high school with all else being equal, it was of course better to choose one with a cute uniform. Despite deciding on a high school based on such an impure motive, Kumiko found it odd that she did not look particularly cute in that uniform now that she was wearing it. The thought about how nice it would have been if she had been born with better looks was a concern that had been plaguing Kumiko of late.

"And now, let's sing the school anthem together. Please rise."

The people around all stood up at the vice principal's words. Kumiko also stood up quickly to follow suit. A piece of paper on which the school anthem was written for the freshmen hung from the podium. During junior high, hardly any students would sing the school anthem, but how would it be like during high school? In order not to end up as the odd one out, Kumiko took a few glances around her. The freshmen around her all had somewhat uncertain looks on their faces. They too were probably waiting to see what others did.

Below the stage, the concert band had serious faces with their instruments readied. A female student with a scary face had her conductor baton standing by. A golden [euphonium](#) shone under the fluorescent light. On seeing that, Kumiko

drew a sharp breath. The conductor raised her hand. At that instant, the instruments were raised all at once. The group of glittering trumpets faced straight in Kumiko's direction. She was sure she could hear the band members draw their breaths. The conductor baton pointed upward for an instant, and subsequently swung downward.

"..... it's awful."

Unwittingly, the words pricked her mouth. The sounds that flew into her ears were outrageously discordant. Dispersed rhythm and scattered tempo. The music from the instruments was completely out of sync with the movements of the conductor baton. *I was thinking of continuing with wind music in high school, but if they are at this level, I shall give it a pass. Forget the Regionals, getting a gold is out of the question even for the Kyoto Prefectures.*

Indifferent to those thoughts of Kumiko, the music moved on steadily. While the singing voices of the teachers could be heard from the edges of the walls, it seemed like none of the students were singing. Before long, the song ended, and the students took their seats. While the entrance ceremony proceeded smoothly, Kumiko's head was filled with thoughts of both anticipation and apprehension about her upcoming high school life. Which club should she join? Would she be able to make friends? What would her homeroom teacher be like?

"Next, we shall have the freshman address from the freshman representative, Kousaka Reina."

On hearing a familiar name, Kumiko looked up sharply. A dignified affirmation resounded through the gymnasium, and a beautiful girl in sailor uniform stood up. Lustrous long black hair, and enormous eyes which threatened to fall out. Her straight and upright back demonstrated her confidence.

Kousaka Reina.

Kumiko was in the same junior high, and in the same concert band as her. For someone with good grades and a good reputation among teachers, it was not strange for Reina to be the freshman representative. But, for someone with her brains, she should have gone to a much better school, so why did she choose this school? Surely, she would not have chosen this school because of the uniform like Kumiko herself, would she? As Kumiko mulled over it, Reina turned to face her unexpectedly. Her obsidian-like eyes stared intently at Kumiko. *Could it be*

that she's looking at me? There was a clear exchange of gazes between the two of them. It took place for only an instant but to Kumiko, it felt like ages. The corner of Reina's mouth relaxed inadvertently, and as if nothing had happened, she turned her gaze to the front. Her lips moved, and words flowed from them without any hesitation. Freshman representative. As Kumiko turned that magnificent title over in her head, she sighed out softly.

"Hey! What's your name?"

After entering the classroom for year 1 class 3, a voice called out to Kumiko the instant she sat on her seat. She turned to see a short-haired girl flashing a broad smile at her. White teeth showed through the gap between her thin lips. Her tanned skin suggested that she might have been in a sports club previously. She was the type whom Kumiko had never mixed around with until now. Kumiko tried to hide her confusion with a vague smile.

"I'm Oumae Kumiko."

"You're called Kumiko? I'm Katou Hazuki. You can call me Katou or Hazuki or anything you like."

Saying that, Hazuki leaned over her desk. *She seems to be the chummy kind*, thought Kumiko as she too turned to face her.

"So, which junior are you from? You're not from East Junior right?"

"I'm from North Junior."

"North Junior? That's rare."

Hazuki's eyes widened in surprise.

"Kitauji you know, I'm not sure why, but it's full of peeps from East Junior. Though I'm also from East Junior, there're too many faces I know that I didn't feel like I've entered high school at all."

"Then you must have lots of friends. That's nice, I'm envious."

"No no no, that's not nice at all. It's awful that there're peeps here who know me from junior high. They'll surely creep out if I try to make a fresh start in high school."

"They won't do that, will they?"

"They will, I'm telling you. That's why I've held back from getting my hair dyed."

I actually wanted to dye my hair red or something, you know. Hazuki brushed her fingers through her hair as she said that. *That sounds like something way beyond a fresh start in high school.* Thought Kumiko but she did not say it out loud.

"By the way, I've been wondering about this, but why're you speaking standard Japanese?"^[2]

"Uhhh, I used to live in Tokyo. Probably because of that?"

"Oh really, don't you get influenced to switch to Kansai dialect?"

"Probably not since my whole family speaks standard Japanese. Oh, but my friends often said that they got influenced to speak standard Japanese instead."

"Hmm. Then I shall be careful not to get influenced."

Said Hazuki indifferently while keeping her chin rested in her hands. Her right cheek was drawn, and a seemingly smiling expression surfaced on her face. Kumiko opened her mouth to say something but she missed her chance as the teacher entered the classroom. It was a woman with white hair tied behind her and she had a somewhat intimidating feel. She was probably in her early fifties. The teacher looked around the classroom, and cleared her throat loudly.

"Sit down."

The noisy classroom just went silent at that quiet but yet authoritative voice. The students who had been chattering until now hurriedly took their assigned seats according to the name register order. *S-Scary*, Hazuki murmured softly.

"You're already high school students; it's not really a commendable thing to be

making senseless noise in the classroom. High school education is not part of compulsory education. Be more mindful of yourselves as high school students."

The heat-laden atmosphere turned cold for an instant. The teacher sighed out disapprovingly and grabbed a chalk with her bony hand. White characters appeared on the green blackboard.

"I am the homeroom teacher for year 1 class 3, Matsumoto Michie. I teach music. I'm also the co-adviser for the concert band."

Concert band. Beside her, Hazuki stiffened in response to those words.

"Just to say this first, I take pride in being the strictest teacher in this school. I'm not going to play nice so prepare yourselves."

After saying that, Michie slowly took out a black file.

"Let me do a roll call first. Acknowledge clearly when you're called. --- Asai Yuudai."

"Present!"

"Ishikawa Yuki."

"Present!"

In junior high, the students would just lazily raise their hands when their names got called during roll calls. But it seemed like they would have to give a proper verbal acknowledgement in high school. Was it because they had to be subservient to rules as they were approaching adulthood? Or maybe it was because this teacher was just scary?

"--- Oumae Kumiko."

"..... ah, present!"

She nearly missed the call while getting caught up in her own rumination. The atmosphere in the classroom unwound after Kumiko made her acknowledgement in a flurry. Hazuki looked at her with a grin. Embarrassed, Kumiko unconsciously lowered her head.

"--- Katou Hazuki."

"Present!"

"Kawashima..... Ryokuki?"

For the first time, a look of bewilderment showed on Michie's face.

Before Michie, who had come to a stop in her roll call, a girl with soft fluffy hair raised her hand timidly.

"P-Pardon me. I-It's Sapphire. It's written as 'shining green', and read as 'Sapphire'."

Sapphire? A murmur ran through the classroom. She shrunk as if she were embarrassed by her own name. Her dainty back shriveled.

"I beg your pardon, Kawashima Sapphire right? I'll make sure to get it right next time."

After saying that, Michie promptly continued to the next name on the register. The buzz in the classroom also immediately receded back to silence again. But still, Sapphire? It was a name only permitted to a comely girl. As Kumiko turned that thought over in her head, she once again shifted her gaze to the girl in front. Regrettably, she was unable to see her face from behind.

Hazuki murmured in wonder.

"Sapphire huh, what a cool name."

Her aesthetic sense seems a little unique, Thought Kumiko.

All right, we're done for today. Make sure you put in effort for tomorrow's proficiency test.

The first day of high school life came to an end with those words of their homeroom teacher. *Gosh, I haven't been studying since the entrance examination.* Kumiko sighed out unwittingly.

"Kumiko, where do you live? Let's go home together."

After stuffing her textbooks into her schoolbag, Hazuki stood before her, all ready to go. A trumpet key chain hung from her black leather bag.

"I live near [Byōdō-in](#), are you going the same way?"

"Yup. I'm getting off at [Oubaku](#) via [Keihan rail](#)."

"Oh really. You're pretty near."

While saying that, Kumiko also stood up. Kumiko's bag had not a single accessory attached. Since she did not really like to have things jingling from her bag.

"Hazuki, were you in the concert band in junior? You have a trumpet on your bag."

Kumiko pointed to her key chain. Hazuki shook her head in the midst of her chortle.

"Nah. I was in a hardcore tennis club."

"You do give off an athletic aura."

"You can tell from my tanned complexion right? I got it during training. I was originally fairer though."

Smiling, Hazuki rolled up her sleeve. The tan ended at a place where the skin turned pale. *It's probably what they call a sportswoman's tan line.*

"Ah, but I'm planning to join the concert band in high school. Seems fun."

"That so? I was in concert band in junior."

"For real? Are you going to continue in high school?"

I haven't decided. The moment Kumiko opened her mouth to reply, she was cut off by another voice.

"Erhm, are both of you planning to join the concert band?"

Hazuki and Kumiko both turned their heads toward that voice. The person

standing there was the fluffy haired girl from earlier. No one would ever forget that name of hers. Kawashima Sapphire. The girl with that peculiar name had a sheepish, gentle looking face.

"Ah, Sapphire-chan."

Hazuki called her name without a hint of malice. In that instant, her face turned beet red like a [boiled octopus](#).

"E-Erhm, don't take this negatively, but please don't call me by that name."

"Huh, why?"

"I don't like that name. It's embarrassing."

"Sapphire' sounds cool! I love it."

"There're probably some who might find it cool, but it can't be pronounced normally and it gets really embarrassing."

Sapphire lowered her eyes as she said that. Kumiko inwardly too had the same view as Sapphire. If she were the one with that name, she would fail to live up to it.

"So, can you just call me Midori?"

"Midori huh! Okay got it!"

Hazuki nodded in assent and slapped her hand against Sapphire's back. It was probably her way of showing affection, though Sapphire staggered unsteadily with her petite body.

"So, which junior were you from? Let's go back together."

"You don't mind?"

Sapphire darted an inquiring glance at Kumiko. Breaking into a smile, *of course not*, Kumiko gave an emphatic nod.

After passing through the doorway of the shoe locker area, they felt a whiff of cold air on their skin. The cherry blossom trees planted around the schoolyard already had their flower petals scattered everywhere. Green folioles were peaking out without a hint of reservation from the willowy branches. Not a single one of the students that were passing by noticed the scattered cherry blossoms, maybe because they had no interest in them. Wearing matching uniforms, their faces seemed to look the same to Kumiko.

"I was from Seijo. I had been attending private schools since elementary school."

Carrying her school bag over her shoulder, Sapphire smiled modestly. Seijo Junior Academy. Hearing that familiar name, Kumiko responded without thinking.

"Seijo, isn't that the one with an ultra strong concert band?"

Hazuki made a surprised face on hearing Kumiko's words.

"That so?"

"It's a really amazing school. A regular at the Nationals."

"Woah! That's incredibly amazing."

On hearing those words, Sapphire scratched her head in embarrassment. Her fluffy hair appeared to be brown in color from the sunlight passing through it.

"It's not that I'm amazing but just that our adviser was amazing."

"Is there a link between the adviser and a band's performance? Somehow, it looks to me like everyone is just playing the way she sees fit."

"That's not true. Just like when a sports club gets a really good coach, a concert band also becomes strong when they get an excellent instructor."

"Oh really, that's how it goes huh."

Hazuki nodded in admiration at Kumiko's explanation. *Crunch*, a sound was heard from between the soles and the stones they came into contact with. The road hardened by asphalt was smooth and not a single stalk of grass could be

found on it.

"What instrument did you play, Midori?"

"Well, I played the [contrabass](#) and only that right from the very beginning."

"Contrabass? What's that?"

Sapphire puffed up her cheeks in a pouting manner at Hazuki's question.

"It's a musical instrument that's like a large violin! It's really cool!"

"Ah, r-really?"

Pressed by Sapphire's intensity, Hazuki nodded. While watching their exchange from the corner of her eyes, *Contrabass huh*, Kumiko murmured. Sapphire was about 10 centimeters shorter than Kumiko, around 150 centimeters in height. Kumiko could not quite imagine her playing such a large instrument that was nearly 2 meters tall.

"How about you, Kumiko-chan?"

"Huh."

"What instrument did you play? You were in concert band in junior right?"

Sapphire had drawn near right next to Kumiko while she was lost in her rumination. Peering into Kumiko's face, her action resembled that of a little animal in an adorable manner.

"I played the eupho."

"Ooh! Eupho!"

"A UFO?"

Sapphire's eyes sparkled at Kumiko's words, while Hazuki made a perplexed face. She had probably never heard of an instrument called eupho. Kumiko was already used to getting the kind of reaction exhibited by Hazuki.

"It's not UFO, but eupho. It refers to a bass instrument called euphonium.

Well, it's a pretty minor instrument."

"Uh-huh. Guess I really want to play a more showy kind of instrument. Like the trumpet, or the sax."

"It's natural to think like that. Many bass instruments are plain. Even for me, before I joined the concert band, I was thinking of playing the flute."

Sapphire smiled wryly as she said that. Indeed, it felt like the flute would have suited her more than the contrabass.

"Midori, are you planning to join the concert band in high school as well?"

"Yeah, that's right."

Kumiko was somewhat stumped by her prompt reply. Hazuki's eyes sparkled in delight.

"I see! Then, we'll be in the same club."

"But you know, the concert band of this school..... is kinda, you know."

As if reading Kumiko's thoughts from her evasive words, Sapphire continued in her place.

"Hopelessly bad."

"Really? They sounded normal to me though."

Hazuki tilted her head in puzzlement.

The performance level of high school concert bands had been rising year by year. To someone experienced like Kumiko, compared to someone inexperienced like Hazuki, the same performance might sound different.

Sapphire smiled at her reaction.

"At that level, it's even doubtful as to whether they would be able to get a silver for the Prefectures. Kansai Regionals aside, it'll be impossible to even get a dud gold."

"What's a dud gold?"

"While the high schools that go to the Kansai Regionals are selected from among the gold awardees, the gold that got awarded to schools that do not get chosen to move on to the Regionals is termed as a dud gold."

On hearing the words 'dud gold', Kumiko felt a little gloomy. In order to change the subject, she asked Sapphire.

"Midori, you were originally from Seijo right? Will you be able to tolerate that level of club activities?"

The girl before her scratched her cheek as if she was troubled; *you have a point*, she said in a thoughtful voice.

"I'll be happy if I can play my music, so I'm not too concerned with their level. It might be nice to just do it for fun for a change."

"I see."

"Kumiko-chan, will you be joining too?"

"Huh?"

Kumiko stumbled for words at Sapphire's question, which was thrown at her in a matter-of-course manner. *I haven't decided on which club to join*. But she was hesitant to say that. For a moment, an awkward silence descended upon the three of them. Hazuki wrapped her arm around Kumiko's shoulder to break that silence.

"Are you also joining the concert band, Kumiko?"

Hazuki queried innocently. *Who would be able to say 'no' to a face like that?* With an awkward smile, Kumiko nodded in resignation.

"Y-Yeah..... I'm planning to do that."

Satisfied perhaps by that answer, the corner of Sapphire's mouth relaxed.

"That's great. I've been worrying whether I would be able to make any friends at

club activities."

"Let's all get along!"

Said Hazuki energetically. Seeing the smiles on their faces, Kumiko started to think that maybe her decision was not that much of a snafu after all. *Maybe it's not so bad to get caught up in the flow of others.* Despite that thought, as she recalled the concert band performance at the school entrance ceremony in the midst of her rumination, she sighed inwardly.

Upon exiting the [Keihan Uji station](#) immediately, an erected bridge was seen. That would be the [Uji Bridge](#). From atop the bridge, vermilion bridges leading to the pagoda island^[3] could be seen, and a stroll in the early morning would allow one to enjoy the beautiful scenic view befitting of a sightseeing area. Crossing the bridge and a left turn thereafter would lead to Byōdō-in street. Kumiko was particularly fond of this street, where one could find long established tea houses and Japanese-styled confectioneries lined along it. Just a whiff of the fragrant aroma of roasted green tea drifting along with the wind was enough to fill Kumiko with anticipation. As she proceeded along the stone-paved road, the entrance to Byōdō-in came into view. An admission fee was needed to enter the temple premise so the main shrine could not be seen from where she was.^[4]

"You enrolled in Kitauji huh."

While walking in cheery spirits, a jolt ran along her back at the same time those words rang out from behind her. It seemed like she was pushed from behind. As she pitched forward, she forced herself to regain her balance and immediately turned around.

"Hey, what're you doing out of the blue?"

"Er, I just happened to catch sight of you."

The one who replied with a completely innocent face was Kumiko's childhood friend. Tsukamoto Shuuichi. A slender man at 180 centimeters in height. He was not only in the same concert band as Kumiko in junior high, but as a result of some unknown karma, they were in the same class for all 3 years. Since there were different classes for the science and humanity streams in high schools, even

fate could not go that far to put them in the same class again.

"You never told me you were going to Kitauji."

"It's none of your concern anyway."

"Normally, you'd have told me? We would be in the same high school after all."

"Hmph? Normally huh."

Kumiko curled the corner of her mouth upward meaningfully and with that, she turned on her heel. Once she reached Ajirogi road, which extended from Byōdō-in street and was laid to run alongside Uji river, she would be able to arrive at the path that would lead to the condominium where she lived.

"Hey wait up."

Shuuichi appeared flustered and increased his walking speed to walk alongside Kumiko. Since he lived in the same building as Kumiko.

"What're you mad about?"

"What am I mad about? Are you saying that for real?"

Kumiko answered without even a single glance at Shuuichi. *Yeah*, he folded his arm as he acknowledged with a troubled look.

"I don't really have any clue."

"Really, I see. Goodbye."

Just as Kumiko was about to walk away from him, Shuuichi grabbed her arm hastily.

"Wait wait wait! Don't just ignore me."

"Then please apologize for your past wrong."

"Wow, what's wrong, what's with the cold shoulder?"

"I'm not being cold."

"Liar."

Shuuichi sighed out, dumbfounded. Clad in a black stand-up collared uniform, he had grown much taller since junior high. Though he used to be smaller in size than Kumiko. Pissed by the fact that she could not see his face if she did not look up, Kumiko gave a hard slap to his back. *Ouch!* Shuuichi seemed to groan on purpose.

"*Don't talk to me ugly woman!* You said that to me in our third year in junior, didn't you?"

"Oh, that..... it was just, you know, that."

Shuuichi clearly lost his composure on hearing Kumiko's words. Maybe it was because he remembered what he did then. *Huh?*, Kumiko hit his back again.

"What do you mean by 'that'?"

"That's because you were asking me whether I was going over to your place for dinner, right in front of the other guys. We were at the height of our pubescent years and I was trying to hide my embarrassment, you know."

"What kind of excuse is that? Was it a bad thing for others to know that you were having dinner at my place?"

"No, it's not that it was a bad thing or anything like that..... I was just feeling embarrassed."

"All right I see now I got it that's fine please don't come close to me."

"You don't need to tell me that in one breath! What's with you? It happened like a year ago, it's high time you forgive me. Mom's also sad and has been asking why you haven't been coming to our place."

"I'll think about it once you apologize."

"Ok ok I'll do it. Sorry sorry."

"Wow, you're really cheesing me off."

Without bothering to hide her anger, Kumiko's brows knitted together. Shuuichi put his hands together and kept repeating 'sorry' over and over again. Finding the sight of a big man like him bowing over and saying 'sorry' repeatedly comical, Kumiko sighed out loudly in resignation.

"Forget it, this is becoming a pain anyway."

"Oh! You're forgiving me?"

"I never did say that though."

"Oh, I see. Please forgive me."

Taking a glance at Shuuichi, who had adopted a laudable attitude, Kumiko snorted. She switched her bag that was filled with textbooks over to her left shoulder. Easing off her brisk pace, she shrugged softly.

"..... which club are you planning to join in high school?"

Relieved at the change in subject perhaps, Shuuichi's face relaxed visibly. His sneakers, which were probably bought by his mother given his bad taste, made pleasing sounds as they kicked off the pavement.

"I was just fretting about that."

"At any rate, you'll just join the band again right?"

"Don't make it sound like I'm no good for anything else! How about you?"

"Me? Well..... probably the band I guess."

"The band again? Look who's talking."

"I didn't really want to join the band originally."

Kumiko pouted.

"Then why're you joining?"

Shuuichi peered into her face. Kumiko averted her eyes somehow and tried to fudge off with a vague smile and reply. But her childhood friend saw through all

of that.

"Don't tell me it happened again? Getting caught up in the flow of others around you?"

"..... well, you can say that I guess."

"Don't you think it's high time you fix that personality of yours? Things can get messy if you can't voice out your own opinion."

"I know that already."

Kumiko puckered her lips at the lecture she received. Things were becoming not so amusing.

"But well, if you're joining, then I'll join the band too. What instrument should I play, hmm."

Shuuichi said without hesitation and stretched himself. His pale wrists extended slightly from his sleeves. *He's like a cat*, thought Kumiko somehow.

"Is it okay to just decide on your club like that?"

"Yeah. I'm not athletic so my choices are pretty limited anyway."

"..... oh right."

Kumiko muttered, trying to feign apathy as best as she could. Bathed in the rays of the setting sun, the dark brown loafers she just bought shone dully. The young man before her smiled as if embarrassed, and made a flimsy attempt in changing the topic. *By the way you know, there's a really beautiful girl in my class*. Upon hearing those words, Kumiko unwittingly gave him a good and hard kick from behind.

The actual commencement of club activities took place around two weeks after the school entrance ceremony, towards the end of April. Assembled inside the music room, each and every one of the concert band applicants sat with apprehensive looks on their faces. The people surrounding them appeared to be

their seniors in the band. The female student with a scary face who swung the conductor baton during school entrance ceremony was also among them.

"Prez, doesn't seem like any more will be coming."

A student holding a clarinet said softly to the president. Kumiko turned her head to look around her. The seated students numbered just under 30 and there were a few faces that Kumiko knew from among them.

"I see, well, I guess this is all we have?"

The girl addressed as president seemed to ponder as she rubbed her chin. A largish sax that she was carrying hung from her neck. It was a [baritone saxophone](#). She stepped out to the front of the classroom and took a deep breath.

"Uhm, hello everyone. I'm the president of the concert band, Ogasawara Haruka. I play the baritone sax, and I guess I'll be seeing the applicants for saxophone parts a lot."

Ogasawara smiled sweetly as she said that. Her voice was well projected as expected of a club president.

"Our concert band has had a long history, and until around a decade ago, had been a veteran and well-known among the high schools. We had even gone to the Nationals..... well, it's far beyond reach for us right now however."

The walls of the music room was decorated by the spectacular glory of the concert band. A regular at the Kansai Regionals, a gold at the Nationals..... The framed picture was notably old and its dust-covered past felt somehow melancholic.

"And erhm, we're actually getting a change in adviser this year. Last year we had a teacher called Rikako-sensei as our adviser, but she has been on maternity leave since this year. We'll be having a new teacher adviser to replace her, though we too do not know much about that teacher yet. He is the very Taki-sensei who was introduced during the entrance ceremony, though it seems like he'll come in a little late today. Also, as our co-adviser Michie-sensei is at the parent orientation meeting, she won't be coming today. Just to let you freshmen know, that teacher is really scary so take care not to make her mad."

Michie-sensei was Kumiko's homeroom teacher. *So she really is a scary teacher, it seems.*

"What we'll be doing today is to assign the instruments. The seniors that have been standing around here are the representatives of the respective instruments. They'll be introducing the instruments so for first-timers, please use that as a reference to decide on the instrument you want to apply for. Also, experienced people please sound out in advance. As there is the matter of compatibility with the different instruments, we'll take your aptitude into consideration when assigning the instruments. Please don't complain if you don't get the instrument you apply for at the end of the day."

As soon as Ogasawara said that, she called the surrounding students to her side. The first person who stood in front was a beautiful girl carrying a trumpet. Even though she had the same silky black hair as Reina, the impression she gave off from her appearance was completely opposite. She looked so vulnerable that she probably invoked in the guys a desire to protect her. She bowed courteously and modestly, and took a glance in the direction of Ogasawara for an instant. Maybe because she was nervous, her face was slightly crimson.

"I'm the section leader for [trumpets](#), Nakaseko Kaori. The trumpet is often regarded as the lead among the brass instruments, so I believe everyone knows about it even without my introduction. There are currently 6 members in the trumpet section and we get along really well. There are many solo and melody parts for the trumpet, and I'm sure it'd be fun. Regardless of whether you are experienced or a beginner, we welcome you to join us, so please do apply for the section."

Everyone clapped after she was done. After her turn, other instruments got introduced progressively. [Trombone](#), [horn](#), [flute](#), [saxophone](#), [clarinet](#), [oboe](#), [percussion](#)..... Major instruments like the flute and sax garnered attention no matter who did the introductions or how the introductions were done, but minor instruments were comparatively less popular. While Kumiko played the euphonium in junior high, it might be a good idea to try a different instrument in high school. While pondering about that, Kumiko turned her gaze to outside the window. The athletic venue could be seen visibly from the music room which was located at the furthest end of the third floor of the northern premise. Members of the baseball and soccer teams were running around on the field while making senseless noises. She was bad at dealing with people from the

athletic clubs. Since she had absolutely no idea what they were thinking.

"Next, we'll have the eupho."

Ogasawara's words brought Kumiko's attention back to the room. A tall, beautiful girl with striking red-framed spectacles carrying a silver euphonium made her entrance. It was the female student who was waving the conductor baton at the school entrance ceremony. Maybe it was because of her long-slit eyes, she somehow gave off the impression that she was the rational type. She pushed her spectacles up with her index finger, and turned the corner of her mouth upwards.

"I'm the leader of the bass section, Tanaka Asuka. As you can see, I play the euphonium."

Eupho? The students who seemed to have no prior experience looked puzzled. Perhaps already expecting that kind of reaction, *That's right!*, Asuka made a forceful affirmation.

"The euphonium is also referred to a B-flat [tuba](#) with 4 piston valves affixed. Even though the actual history of this instrument is not entirely clear, one theory credits it to Ferdinand Sommer, a concert master of Weimar, who made improvements to the sommerophone that was conceptualized by himself and which then became widely used, while another theory attributes it to a Belgian named Adolphe Sax and the euphonium was said to have originated from a class of his [saxhorns](#) as a widespread piston-type bass instrument, which went on to be further developed in England to become the euphonium of today. It was originally called 'euphonion' but this name came from the greek word 'euphonos' which means 'well-sounding'. Just as it implies, the euphonium is an extraordinary excellent instrument that has a wide range on the bass register and yet makes a soft sound! While the history of the euphonium in Japan is not well established, it started from [Meiji](#) year 3 when the instrument arrived in Japan from England. While the trainee troops of the military band received English-style instruction initially, in Meiji year 3, after separating from the land forces, the naval military band continued with the English-style instruction but which then was later switched to German-style, while the army military band took on French-style instruction, and consequently, with regards to the euphonium section, it was known by various names such as the euphonion or baritone section in the navy, and petite bass or small bass section in the army. According

to what we know from paintings, the French saxhorn was eventually used to refer to the instrument, but, for a period in time, depending on the direction of the instructor be it in navy, music schools, various music groups, or the concert bands in schools, the German baritone or euphonium had also been used. After the second World War, as a result of its popularization in the school bands that had received instruction from America, now, its name has been established as 'euphonium', or also 'euphoneum', and the piston-type euphonium developed in England has become the mainstream instrument. And thus ---"

"All right all right, that's enough! Asuka, it's fine to regurgitate the info from wikipedia here, but at the very least keep it short."

The president's words cut off the seminar given by Tanaka Asuka, which seemed like it would go on forever. Judging from the calm expressions of the seniors, this seemed like a routine thing for her. Asuka puffed her cheeks in discontentment at the interruption.

"You know, I haven't even yet told them the appeal of the eupho!"

"No no, it's already plenty. All right next, can we have the tuba please?"

"I haven't even finished....."

While expressing her dissatisfaction, Asuka withdrew to the side reluctantly. *Why is such a person a section leader?* Kumiko wondered privately.

"..... I'm Gotou Takuya and I play..... the tuba."

Replacing Asuka and taking the stage was a man who was large in both the vertical and horizontal dimension. Compared to the talkative Asuka, he was really gloomy. Wearing a pair of black-framed spectacles, he was carrying an instrument that was several times larger than the euphonium. It was the tuba, which boast itself as the largest brass instrument.

"The tuba is a bass instrument that has hardly any melody parts..... and is a plain instrument. It's also heavy. About 10 kilos..... The length of the tube is about 6 meters. During marching, we use another white colored instrument known as the [sousaphone](#)..... which is also heavy....."

"....."

"....."

"Huh, it's done?"

Ogasawara's eyes widened in surprise. Takuya scratched his head, troubled.

"Yeah, I'm done....."

"Hey Gotou! You didn't convey the appeal of the tuba at all! Let me, Tanaka Asuka, do the tuba introduction for you ---"

"All right all right, you keep quiet."

Ogasawara promptly shot down the proposal from Asuka, who had raised her hand spiritedly.

"The bass section actually has one more instrument, which is the contrabass, but regrettably, we don't have a member on it since the third years from the previous year graduated. If there's anyone who has experience in it, I hope you can apply for the spot. We'll be in trouble if we can't find a player for it."

By the way, this is the contrabass! Asuka carried the instrument over. *Oooh*, the beginners exclaimed at seeing a string instrument larger than Asuka.

"Anyone experienced in it?"

Ogasawara looked around the room. Prompted by the president's question, a slender hand was timidly raised from the center of the room. It was Sapphire.

"E-Erhm, I played the contrabass in junior."

The instant Asuka saw her, her eyes gleamed sharply. Thrusting the instrument to the president, she walked over to Sapphire in brisk strides. As if she was overwhelmed by that fervor, Sapphire froze as her eyes widened. Asuka took her hands roughly and gripped them firmly. Her comely face came close to Sapphire. Her black hair flowed over her shoulders and covered her expression.

"Will you do it?"

Her lowered voice was somewhat alluring. For some reason, even Kumiko's

pulse quickened at that. Sapphire's eyes were fixated on their senior's face, entranced, but she sharply returned from her reverie. Her cheeks rapidly turned scarlet.

"Y-Yes. Er, if you're okay with me, I'll be happy to."

"Really? All right! You're really a lifesaver."

Asuka's earlier serious expression seemed to have gone off somewhere as she made a carefree smile. *I see, this is her technique in seizing people's hearts*, analyzed Kumiko secretly.

"Which means, Haruka, I'm getting this girl!"

"Ah, right right. Got it got it."

The president placed the instrument on the ground and waved her hand. With that, she took a notebook from the top of the piano. The flimsy notebook in which the band member names were recorded looked pretty worn out from extensive usage.

"All right, let's fill up the rest of the sections. It's troublesome have each and every one of you to declare what you want to apply to, so please make your way to the representative for the instrument you wish to apply. If you fail, please choose another one. That's about it, carry on."

Prompted by Ogasawara's instruction, the freshmen started moving.

"Kumiko, what instrument will you be applying to?"

Sitting behind Kumiko, Hazuki brought her face forward to her.

"Uhm, let's see."

Kumiko gave a vague elusive reply and looked in the direction of Asuka. Sapphire, who had already settled her spot as a contrabass player, was treated like a toy by Asuka and for some reason had a cheek pulled. Next to them, Takuya tried to pacify Asuka with a dumbfounded look on his face.

"That senior is really interesting."

Hazuki remarked pleasantly.

"The bass section has a rich array of personalities."

"Is it like that? Maybe their personalities are related to their preferred instruments?"

"Is that so?"

"I'm the type who prefers to stand out rather than play a supporting role, I'd prefer the trumpet or some cool instrument."

Hazuki pointed in Kaori's direction as she said that. Most of the girls gathered around Kaori appeared to be conspicuous in some way.

"All right, I'm joining the line."

With a good-natured smile, she joined the queue of trumpet applicants. Most of the students were already at their aspired instruments. Only Kumiko was left in the center of the room, drifting left and right. *What should I choose?* Kumiko sighed out. She did not have any yearning desire to play any particular instrument. She was fine with just getting assigned with what was left. And she would not need to brood over this. As if she was searching for a destination, Kumiko's gaze fell to her palm. The fine creases that were etched into it resembled a map of nameless towns.

"Are you brooding over what to play?"

Kumiko looked up sharply at the sudden voice. She was startled to see the unexpected face of Asuka right before her eyes.

Asuka pushed her spectacles up with her finger and stared at Kumiko unreservedly. *H-How can I help you?* Kumiko unwittingly took a step backward.

"Up till now, no one but that girl from earlier applied to my section you know."

"Oh, is that so?"

For some reason, Asuka's eyebrows knitted at her frank reply. The senior in front of her folded her arms, and sighed out deliberately.

"Up till now, no one but that girl from earlier applied to my section you know."

"Oh right. I heard what you said just now."

""Up till now, no one but that girl from earlier ---"

"Er, why are you repeating the same thing three times?"

Unable to bear it anymore, Kumiko cut her off without thinking. Asuka narrowed her eyes and brushed her hair upwards.

"You're really slow huh. I'm inviting you to my section you know?"

"Ah, it's an invitation?"

"Yes, an invitation."

Are you interested in the euphonium? Her lips arched upwards slowly.

"Right now, the instruments left for my section are just the euphonium and tuba. The fact that it's not popular every year is kind of worrying..... how about it? If you don't have anything you want to apply for in particular, how about trying it?"

"Eupho huh?"

"Yes, eupho."

As Kumiko searched for her reply, Sapphire trotted to her side. The white ribbon at her bosom fluttered.

"Kumiko-chan, are you joining the bass section as well?"

"Huh."

"I'm really happy! It'd be kind of lonely otherwise."

Right? Sapphire cocked her head. Somehow, it seemed like Kumiko joining the bass section had become a definite thing for her.

"..... all right, I'll take the eupho then."

"All right! Member secured!"

Asuka snapped her fingers with a triumphant look on her face.

"Let's do our best together in the bass section, Kumiko-chan!"

Sapphire smiled innocently. Behind her, Asuka murmured softly.

"..... this girl is useful."

"Senpai, what are you scheming?"

Kumiko asked without thinking. Asuka turned toward her, and with a broad smile on her face, *Huh, nothing really?*, she replied.

"..... uh-huh."

It seemed like this senior of hers would be a tricky person to deal with.

"Let's see, the rest of the freshmen are already at their aspired instruments waiting for their try-outs, I guess I have to wait for those who fail."

"Are you going to have them take the tuba?"

"It can't be helped, there's no one applying for it. It's always like this every year for the tuba and euphonium..... I wonder why, they are such cool instruments."

During her junior high days, the bass instruments were not popular as well. It seemed like the students who join concert bands all prefer cool and striking instruments. When Kumiko decided to join the brass band in elementary school, she too was thinking of playing the trombone. She was fascinated with the movement of sliding the trombone to the tune of jazz music. In the end, as a result of her lot perhaps, she was assigned to play the euphonium.

As Kumiko looked in the direction of Hazuki, she was right in the midst of her try-out. A brass instrument has a mouthpiece part where one blows into. The size of the mouthpiece is smaller for a smaller instrument and larger for a larger instrument. Comparing the mouthpieces of a tuba and trumpet is like comparing an adult to a child. Unlike a woodwind instrument, one puts her lips to the mouthpiece of a brass instrument and vibrates her lips. A brass instrument emits

sounds based on the vibrations of the player's lips.

However, this blowing motion is the first hurdle for a brass instrument beginner. It would be an easy thing to do if one is used to it, but it requires a technique for a sound to be emitted. Like a [recorder](#), one cannot make a sound just by blowing into it. It is a rather stressful thing to blow into an instrument and not make any sound from it, and as such, there are many who get depressed from wondering whether they are really able to handle the instrument or not.

"Ah, there's no sound!"

With her instrument readied, Hazuki puffed her cheeks in discontentment. Beside her, the section leader Kaori cheered her on enthusiastically. Only the blowing and drawing sounds of Hazuki's breathing could be heard from the [bell](#). It seemed like she would take a day before she could make it sound.

"Kaori-senpai is really kind."

Sapphire nodded in admiration. *That's a given*, Asuka puffed out her chest for some reason.

"She's the Madonna of our band. She's already popular."

"Popular..... with who by the way?"

Even though she already could guess without asking, she still asked timidly.

"What're you talking about, of course with the girls."

Asuka replied with a chortle. *I see*, Kumiko nodded with an evasive smile.

A concert band is a kind of special environment. Basically, the ratio of male to female is one is to nine, to put it strictly, the proportion of girls is often much more. And in such an environment, idolization of the same sex occurs. When this happens, those who become the envy of others and the subject of passionate gazes are either extremely feminine lovely girls, or girls who give off a masculine cool aura. Unfortunately, the guys in concert bands seldom get regarded as guys, and as such do not receive this sort of idolization. This is the reason why they do not get girlfriends despite being in an environment with lots of girls around them..... this was the personal opinion that Kumiko had.

"Tanaka-senpai..... you're also a popular person though."

Uwah!, Kumiko was inadvertently taken aback by the sudden voice from behind her. Turning around, she found the expressionless Takuya standing right beside her.

"Tanaka-senpai..... is this girl confirmed for the eupho spot?"

Without even a glance at Kumiko, Takuya addressed only Asuka. *That's right?*, she acknowledged.

"Tanaka-senpai..... which means Gotou-senpai is your junior?"

Sapphire mused.

"Yup yup, he's still a second year. Be nice to each other."

Upon hearing those words, Kumiko hurriedly bowed her head.

"Ah, I'm Oumae Kumiko. Pleased to meet you."

"..... I'm Gotou."

He said only that and returned to silence. Asuka chuckled.

"Gotou is a shy guy and doesn't talk much. But well, don't let it bother you."

"Oh, right."

In the instant that Kumiko nodded, the sound of a trumpet pierced through the room. A calm gentle high pitch, followed by a soft lingering note. It was an overwhelmingly intense sound clearly different from the rest. All the gazes in the room turned toward it.

Without any change in her expression, the person who just made that sound slowly brought the trumpet away from her lips.

"..... is this okay?"

Said Kousaka Reina. It seemed like it was a part of the test. *Ah, yeah*, nodded Kaori who seemed a little overwhelmed.

"Kousaka-san, you are way too good for our school. Which junior were you from?"

Ogasawara asked, impressed. *North Junior*, Reina replied without a hint of a smile.

"Though I also have private lessons aside from club activities."

"Oh, that's why you're so good. I'm really surprised."

"Thank you for your compliment, I'm happy that you like it."

Without a trace of happiness on her face, she bowed her head slightly. Reina had always been a good-mannered girl but her expression kind of turned that into naught, Kumiko felt.

"Anyway, since everyone already had her try-out, we'll decide on the trumpet members. We have 3 spots so..... we'll be going with Kousaka, Yoshizawa, and Itoda. Those who didn't make it please go for your second choice. All right, let's move it."

At the president's words, the students who did not make the cut wandered aimlessly around the open space. Hazuki was of course among them. Gazing at her vacantly, Sapphire murmured.

"Hazuki-chan didn't make it into the trumpet section huh."

"It's a pity."

"Hmm? Midori-chan, you know that girl?"

Hearing the conversation between the two of them, Asuka closed in smoothly. Her plastered smile gave Kumiko some sort of a bad feeling. However, seemingly unconcerned, *Yes I do?*, Sapphire replied frankly.

"I see I see....."

Rubbing her chin, Asuka sent a meaningful gaze to Kumiko.

"That girl wasn't in the band in junior high right? She didn't manage to even play

a single note earlier."

"She said that she was in the tennis club."

"Hmm? Then there's no issue with her lung capacity."

Muttering to herself, Asuka placed her hands on Sapphire's shoulders. Just that action alone was enough to make Sapphire's cheeks flushed with color.

"Hey Midori-chan, do you think it'll be fun if she joins the bass section as well?"

"Yes!"

"There still isn't anyone applying for the tuba, and it'll be troubling if we don't get any freshman for it..... don't you think that girl is well-suited for the tuba? She seems pretty fit as well."

"Indeed, Hazuki-chan might be suited for the tuba."

"Then, why don't you go invite her? As a senior, it might seem too forceful if I were to do it, but as a friend, she can choose to turn you down freely."

"Understood! I'll go ask Hazuki-chan!"

After her energetic reply, Sapphire dashed off at full speed towards Hazuki. With that, she embraced Hazuki who had her shoulders slumped. From afar, it seemed like she still had a lingering regret towards the trumpet, but she would probably be ensnared in just a few minutes.

"..... Senpai, you've managed to completely tame Midori huh."

Asuka giggled at Kumiko's words.

"I'm really happy that we're having many obedient and cute juniors joining us this year."

"Many, you say..... does that include me as well?"

"Of course."

Asuka pushed her spectacles up as she said that. Those black unreadable eyes

behind the thin lenses stared intently at Kumiko.

"I'm expecting great things from you, Kumiko-chan."

All the members had their instruments assigned about one hour later. The bass section had a final group consisting of the year 1 class 3 trio with Kumiko, Hazuki and Sapphire. Kumiko could see Reina in the trumpet section and Shuuichi in the trombone section. Despite the fact that Shuuichi played the horn in junior high.

"Now that we are done with assigning the instruments, I would like to decide on the direction of our club activities."

Ogasawara looked around the music room. All the members seemed gathered here today for the first club meeting and the room was overflowing with people. The second and third years were engaging in idle chatter languidly. With 80 people in the room, even whispering chitchat would create significant noise and stir up a buzz in the quiet atmosphere.

"Please be quiet. We're in a meeting right now!"

The door made a clattering sound to interrupt Ogasawara's words.

"Oh, everyone's already gathered here?"

"Taki-sensei!"

The president called out happily.

He had a slender physique, and a body that was clearly well proportioned beneath the shirt he was wearing. His friendly visage gave off a gentle impression which took hold of the hearts of the female students in the blink of an eye. His neatly well-trimmed black hair flickered from the reflected light. The white teeth that showed through his lightly parted lips further reinforced his refreshing feel. Taki Noboru. 34 years in age. The homeroom teacher of year 2 class 5. Music teacher.

"Oh, we have quite a number of freshmen with us this year huh. About 30

people?"

"28 people."

"And the unassigned instruments have also been taken. That's fortunate."

Taki narrowed his eyes as he said that.

"Let me introduce myself first. Since I already introduced myself at the opening ceremony, many of you should know who I am by now. I am Taki Noboru and have just joined this school this year. I'm teaching music. Originally, it should be Matsumoto-sensei, who has been the co-adviser of this concert band for a long time, to take up the position of adviser, but in accordance to her wish, I will be taking over as adviser. Nice to meet you."

Upon saying that, Taki took a sincere bow. This was the first person that Kumiko knew who showed such courtesy to children. Claps from the students resounded in the music room. Taki looked up, and the corner of his mouth relaxed.

"During this time each year, I have a request to make of the students."

Saying that, he started writing on the blackboard. A row of white characters, which were abnormally neat that they seemed typed out from a computer, appeared on the dark green space.

"My motto is to respect the initiative of the students. I'll be coaching you throughout this whole year, but before going further, I'll like you to decide on your goal for the year."

Reaching the Nationals. Taki pointed to those words written on the blackboard with his index finger.

"This was your goal for last year right?"

"..... er no, Sensei."

Ogasawara scratched her head in embarrassment at Taki's words.

"Rather than a goal, it was, something more of a slogan of sorts..... nobody seriously thought that we could make it....."

"Oh, I see. Then let's forget about last year."

Taki said without any hesitation and drew a large cross on the blackboard. The lines that were drawn to strike out the words were straight and unbent. Seeing that, Kumiko could not help but feel an intense discomfort and she breathed out emphatically. It was a feeling of vexation. It felt like her own dream was being repudiated. The memory of her own self in junior high was suddenly brought back in the back of her mind. *It's so stupid. I never really thought that we could have made it to the Nationals.* Kumiko ridiculed herself inwardly.

"But I can't really have that in my term. There's nothing more pointless than setting a goal that you have no intention of achieving."

Taki folded his arms with a troubled look.

"I'll act in accordance to your goal. If all of you are serious in aiming for the Nationals, then the practice will of course be demanding as well, but on the contrary, if you feel that it's enough just to appear at the Prefectures and make some pleasant memories, then there'll be no need for tough practice. I'm fine either way, so please decide on your own."

"Is it okay for us to decide ourselves?"

The president seemed perplexed. Taki nodded with a smile. *"Decide on your own"; does this adult even know how troublesome those sweet sounding words are?* Kumiko breathed out and quietly looked around her to assess the situation. So as not to become the odd one out when the situation called for her opinion.

Ogasawara's gaze wandered about in uncertainty, but before long, as if she suddenly noticed Asuka's existence, her eyes focused on her. With a knowing look on the face of Kumiko's chief of the bass section, Asuka flashed a disquieted grin.

"Well, I'll take the minutes."

Asuka stood up after saying that. *As expected of the vice president*, hooted somewhere from behind.

"Asuka-senpai is the vice president?"

Hazuki, who was sitting beside Kumiko, whispered into her ear. *Seems so*, Kumiko replied as she looked in Asuka's direction.

"But how do we decide on the goal?"

"By majority vote?"

Ogasawara brooded over Asuka's suggestion. It appeared to Kumiko that she seemed to be afraid of something.

Majority vote. It is a method by which a group makes a decision in a democratic manner. Kumiko was a person who could not deal well with such a majority vote system. Since she was born, she had lived her entire life allowing herself to be shoved around by this majority vote system. The majority is strong, while the minority is weak. Numbers are turned into strength, and Kumiko had ended up swallowing her tiny voice in just the blink of an eye. Kumiko would never voice out her disagreement to others. Since she was afraid of being shunned. She would empty her mind and pretended to be part of the majority. Kumiko hated her own dishonesty to herself.

"But there's no other way to decide right?"

Said Asuka. *Indeed*, replied Ogasawara.

"Then let's do this. Let's get this over in a jiffy."

As if she had taken a fancy at the word, behind Kumiko, Sapphire repeated the word 'jiffy' in a soft voice. Ogasawara kept quiet, seemingly indecisive, but before long, *can't be helped*, she murmured and turned back to face the room.

"Er, we'll be going with majority vote."

"Leave it to me to do the tally!"

Asuka puffed out her chest for some reason.

"Please raise your hand to indicate your vote for our goal for this year. Do we aim for the Nationals, or just take it easy and be satisfied with participating in the Prefectures?"

Kumiko braced herself at Ogasawara's words. In such a situation, in truth, it was clear on which choice they ought to go with. Among the choices presented by an adult, the children had to choose what would be the most correct choice. A choice that was correct in the eyes of the world, and in the eyes of society. By means of natural elimination, each and every one was bounded by the one remaining answer that had to be chosen.

"So first, those who are in favor of aiming for the Nationals, please raise your hand."

The students' hands shot up all at once at those words. Decorated, polished, peach colored nails glittered in the light of the fluorescent lamps. *It's probably difficult to play an instrument with such long nails.* With that thought in mind, Kumiko too raised her hand. Seeing that most of the people had their hands raised, Asuka abandoned the thought of recording the tally on the blackboard. Since the result was clear.

"All right, next, those who are fine with just the Kyoto Prefectures."

Upon saying those words, a single hand was raised from the center of the room. The fair hand that peeked out of the navy-blue sleeve was upright pointing to the ceiling. Ogasawara swallowed on seeing that hand.

"Aoi....."

She looked surprised. Her eyes wide open, Kumiko too swallowed at the sight.

Saitou Aoi.

The person who came into Kumiko's view was someone whom she was well acquainted with.

"Erhm, only Aoi voted for the later huh."

Asuka wrote on the blackboard as she said that. Just a single, crooked line was drawn on the blackboard. Ogasawara had an anguished, contorted face, but it lasted for only an instant. She brushed her bangs upwards, and took a look at the blackboard with her usual expression. Asuka seemed to get an inkling on something and narrowed her eyes slightly.

"Based on the results of majority vote, we will strive to work towards the goal of reaching the Nationals."

The students broke into applause at the president's words. Satisfied perhaps by the result, Taki too clapped his hands with a gentle expression. He stood up quietly, restrained Asuka, who had her mouth open, with his hand, and looked at the room.

"The goal which has been just set was decided with your own hands. There are also some who objected to it, and maybe others who are opposed to it privately as well. However, this is what all of you have decided. While I'll do my utmost to help you achieve your goal, the only thing I can do is to instruct you. Please do not forget that. If you don't put in your own effort, then you will never be able to achieve your dream."

Understood?

The room remained silent at those words. *Why didn't anyone respond?* As an ominous feeling started mounting inside Kumiko, *clap*, Taki struck his palms together.

"Why are you all in a daze? Where's your answer?"

At the prompt of their adviser's sharp voice, sparse replies came slowly from several places. *Could it be*, thought Kumiko as her eyebrows knitted.

Could it be that this band is not even used to making affirmative answers to their adviser?

"You're too slow, I'm going to do it again. Understood?"

This time, the reply to Taki's question came in unison.

That's all for today. Thank you.

At the signal from the president's dignified voice, the club activities for the day ended. *Thank you. See you tomorrow.* Amid the exchanged greetings that were flying around, Kumiko hastily searched for her back. A mounting frantic feeling grew inside her. Once she saw that familiar back, Kumiko unwittingly stretched her hand towards it.

"Wait! Ao-, Saitou-senpai."

Aoi turned around slowly on hearing those words. Her black hair that rested on her shoulders flowed softly. When she saw Kumiko, her eyes widened, as if taken aback.

"..... Kumiko-chan?"

"Long time no see..... Senpai"

The third year let out a giggle at the politeness shown by the first year. She took Kumiko's hand away from her shoulder, and turned her sight to outside the window.

"..... shall we go home together?"

Kumiko nodded as she bit on that offer.

"Aoi-chan, so you came to Kitauji?"

Aoi made a small smile at Kumiko's words. She lived near Kumiko and was two years older than her. When they were still elementary students, they used to play a lot together as a result of their living proximity, but when Aoi progressed to junior high, they hardly hung out. Kumiko used to look up at the taller Aoi, but now, their heights were not too different. No, perhaps Kumiko was the taller one. As Aoi brushed her beautiful black hair which she took pride in since she was a child with her fingertips, she shrugged with the mannerism of an adult.

"I originally wanted to get into Horiyama High but I failed."

"Oh, I see."

Horiyama High in Kyoto Prefecture was a school which vied for the top two spots and one with really good college admission rates. Aoi used to be an excellent student in the past and it seemed like she still was.

"Which reminds me, since you're my senior, is it okay for me to speak in casual form with you?"

Aoi waved her hands at Kumiko's words.

"It's fine it's fine. It's creepy if you talk to me using polite language. Ah, but please use polite language in front of the rest."

"Uh huh, got it."

Kumiko nodded in acquiescence at her senior's words. Aoi covered her mouth with her hand, and let out an elegant giggle. The schoolbag carried over her shoulders groaned audibly from its weight.

"Aoi-chan, why did you raise your hand earlier?"

"Earlier?"

"When we were deciding on whether to go to the Nationals or not."

Since no one would respond to that kind of discussion seriously, there was no need to put up your hand deliberately right?

Aoi lowered her eyes quietly at Kumiko's question. Their shadows were cast onto the black asphalt. The chilling spring wind blew past them. Kumiko brushed the hems of her skirt without any special reason. Her newly bought uniform had yet to have a single crease on it.

"I wanted to create, an alibi."

Aoi said.

"Alibi?"

Asked Kumiko. Aoi nodded cheerfully and repeated the same words.

"That's right, alibi."

A key chain, which Kumiko could not seem to make up her mind on whether it was cute or not, hung from Aoi's schoolbag. The tawdry eyes of the distorted rabbit stared right at Kumiko.

"When I quit, I would be able to say that I had already voiced out my opinion previously."

"Aoi-chan, are you planning to quit band?"

She made a shrill-sounding voice involuntarily. Aoi smiled wryly at Kumiko who had her eyes wide open.

"Who knows? I'm not too sure yet at this point in time."

"Why? It'd be a pity after continuing for so long."

"But you know."

She paused.

"You know, club activities won't get you into university."

From her voice, which seemed to be heavily layered unintentionally, Kumiko caught a glimpse of her irritation and self-ridicule. *Plonk plonk plonk*. Brand new reference books swayed in her bag.

"Aoi-chan, which university are you aiming for?"

"Well? I haven't decided yet."

She's lying, Kumiko felt with her intuition. *Have you studied for your test? Not at all*. Even her words from such hollow conversations sounded suspicious. A flaky shield, that was characteristic of a student, was used for protecting her ego. Kumiko pretended not to notice and smiled vaguely.

"I see."

"You should be careful too, Kumiko-chan."

Three years will pass in the blink of an eye.

The sound of those unpleasant words spoken by Aoi clung to Kumiko's ears.

Translator's Notes and References[\[edit\]](#)

1. [**↑ Kitauji:**](#) Kitauji actually means 'North Uji', but to make it sound less cumbersome and be more consistent with other translations (anime, blogs, etc.), Kitauji will be used in the translations.
2. [**↑ Character speech patterns:**](#) Except Taki-sensei, Mizore (volume 2 onward), and Kumiko and her family who speak standard Japanese, nearly all characters speak in Kansai dialect. Needless to say, they include Reina, Shuuichi, Natsuki, Asuka, Kaori, Haruka, Yuuko, Hazuki, Midori, etc. etc.
3. [**↑ Pagoda Island:**](#) The pagoda island is a very small piece of land mass that floats on the Uji river, southeast of the Uji bridge. On it is a landmark called the 13-storey stone pagoda at 15 meters high. Source:
<http://www.wao.or.jp/aiso/tales/02/>
4. [**↑ Kumiko route to home:**](#) [map of speculated route](#)